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SUBJECT: ADMINISTRATOR FORE'S VISIT TO THE OGADEN: URGENT
NEED FOR MORE FOOD DISTRIBUTION POINTS AND MALNUTRITION
INCREASES

Summary

¶1. USAID Administrator and Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance Henrietta Fore and Assistant Administrator Almquist visited Gode November 25, meeting with NGOs and local Government officials. Local officials said that the two major developments since the September 7 visit to Gode by Assistant Secretary Frazer were the need for trucks and money to pay for transportation of food to secondary distribution sites, and the increase in malnutrition with the number of children requiring therapeutic feeding at the Gode hospital increasing from three children per week in September to ten per week at present. World Food Program (WFP) staff report that while 9,000 metric tons have been delivered to district warehouses in the past few weeks, a positive response from the Government, it is estimated that 52,000 metric tons is needed to feed 800,000 people in the region of 4 million people for the period October-December 2007. WFP anticipates that emergency food assistance will be required beyond December to May or June of next year. Local officials urge the NGOs to continue their intervention by providing emergency food deliveries indefinitely to prevent this chronically food deficit region from falling back into severe food shortage conditions. End Summary.

¶2. The Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore, accompanied by Assistant Administrator Kate Almquist, Special Assistant Barbara Feinstein, USAID Director Glenn Anders, Senator Feingold's legislative assistant Sara Margon, and Ambassador (notetaker) visited Gode in the Ogaden region on November 25, 2007. In a meeting with local officials, the regional governor, Abdi Farah, outlined two problems for the Administrator: 1) the urgent need for more trucks and money for transporting food throughout the Gode region, and 2) the rise in severe malnutrition of children requiring therapeutic feeding. The Governor explained that while food was reaching the &primary distribution point8 of Gode town, more trucks and money to pay for transportation were urgently required to deliver food to &secondary distribution points8 and beyond. Governor Abdi's advisor, Sheikh Omar, noted that the rural populace did not have camels or animals to help transport food and it was impossible for the rural populace to walk hundreds of kilometers to pick up food at the &primary distribution point8. The Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) representative, Abdi Mahmoud, added that transportation was insufficient and urged the U.S. delegation to help secure more trucks and money to pay for transportation.

¶3. The Governor's advisor noted that malnutrition rates have increased sharply since September, when Assistant Secretary Frazer visited Gode. The Advisor said that the number of children requiring therapeutic feeding at Gode hospital as a result of severe malnutrition increased from three children per week to ten. Throughout the region, it is estimated that there has been a tripling of severe malnutrition of children.

They were not able to provide any estimates on mortality rates, though suspected that rates of death among children have risen, but noted that causes range from malaria and other diseases to malnutrition, all common causes for this region. All of the officials agreed that food distribution beyond Gode town was urgently required to meet the problem. Governor Abdi told the U.S. delegation that the region is chronically food insecure and that ongoing assistance is needed even after the current emergency is brought under control. He urged the Administrator to continue indefinitely food intervention efforts by the humanitarian community as a solution to prevent malnutrition. The Advisor, Sheikh Omar, said the long-term answer was for the pastoralists to transition to farming. This process has already begun, but the advisor and governor said that farm tools, training, and support are needed.

¶4. In a separate meeting with NGOs and UN agencies operating in the area, all funded by USAID, the common plea was for more food and more rapid distribution. World Food Program Director Mohammed Diab said 9,000 metric tons were delivered to district warehouses in the past week and thanked the Embassy's efforts to work with the Federal Government to speed up deliveries. But, Diab noted, 52,000 metric tons of food were required to meet the needs of 600,000 in the

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"restricted" Ogaden region and another 200,000 in the &unrestricted8 areas in the other parts of Ethiopia's Somali region. The current intervention was expected to last through December, but Diab said probably through May or June is more realistic.

¶5. Diab said that the government has agreed to 174 food distribution points in the restricted area. WFP believes that no military escort is needed for 86 sites and is working with the Federal Government for approval. Military escorts will be necessary to deliver food to the 88 sites where counter insurgency operations make it dangerous for distribution to take place. WFP did admit that with the start of military escorts, reports of &leakage8 or disappearance of food has been eliminated. But the problem is that food deliveries are much slower.

¶6. Other NGOs confirmed the critical need to get more food into the region and confirmed the reports by local officials on the need to distribute the food to secondary distribution points and beyond. UNHCR reported that they have been asked to leave the Ogaden region. Their local representative reported that as many as 18,000 refugees from Somalia have fled into the Ogaden to escape the fighting in Somalia. The Kenyan border remains closed and so Somali refugees are finding it difficult to get refuge. UNHCR said there were internally displaced people, but had no statistics on internal population movements. The local governor noted that people from Fik had moved into Gode to escape the fighting. The NGOs said that the livestock market has collapsed, with an exchange of one sheep for one bag of rice three months ago to three sheep now required to secure one bag of rice.

COMMENT

¶7. The remarks from local officials were sharper and more urgent since the visit in September of the Assistant Secretary. The Embassy, in conjunction with USAID plans to

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continue working with GOE officials on problems in the Ogaden. It was agreed in a meeting with the Prime Minister that we would share information to ensure that accurate information was being obtained on the Ogaden. The Ambassador plans to host another regular meeting of the NGOs, UN agencies and donor groups, and follow-up directly with the Prime Minister on what needs to be done to alleviate issues in the Ogaden. In response to her meeting with the Prime Minister, Administrator Fore will make the following points to the Prime Minister:

-- We still receive reports from the NGOs that Ethiopian National Defense Force check points continues to cause delays of food deliveries into the Somali region of Ethiopia.

-- The key to assisting the Somali region is encouraging expanded commercial livestock and food trade.

-- The Ethiopian government agency in charge of food distribution, DPPA, reports that more trucks and money to pay for transportation of food is urgently needed for Ethiopia's Somali region.

-- DPPA and local officials in Gode report that food deliveries to the &primary8 distribution point of Gode town -- and to the other district centers -- must be extended to &secondary8 distribution points and other areas because affected people do not have camels or animals to carry distributed food and no way to walk the many kilometers to reach district centers to get food.

-- We urge the Ethiopian Government to allow the World Food Program to deliver food without military escort to the 86 distribution points in the security area which are not high risk. We understand that this is being considered by the Ethiopian Government. WFP requires military escort service for the other points in the &restricted area8 due to security concerns. We hope that more military escorts can be arranged as some food aid has been in district centers for a week awaiting military escort to distribution points.

-- From my visit to Gode, more food is required for the primary distribution points. 9,000 metric tons have been delivered recently and the WFP estimates that 52,000 metric

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tons will probably be needed for the 800,000 people at risk.

-- USAID and the Embassy look forward to working with the Government of Ethiopia on a development plan for the Somali region of Ethiopia.
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